Power by Any Means Necessary

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Power by Any Means Necessary

by lefemmerouge

Summary

Explosions in Steamland! Alva continues his harebrained scheme to invade Avalor and make himself more powerful. While he is unaware that revolutionaries in the sewers are preparing to rescue imprisoned workers, he has a secret weapon, which he believes can help him rule over this steam-powered city. What happens on the streets of the city will set the groundwork for the danger to come, something which neither Alva, nor the revolutionaries of LAWLOR, are prepared for. In the meantime, Elizabeth "Lizzy" Bowmore and Mx. Eleanor "Ellie" Lawlor (they/them) are beginning to realize feelings for each other, as the city continues to turn into unruly chaos.

Notes

I realize that my last story hasn’t been since April 14 and I apologize for it being that long. I was working on my other series (The Avaloran Chronicles) and a bunch of one-shot fics. Additionally, writing this story was a bit tough in part because I was very invested in that series, and I couldn't figure out how to end this fic. Secondly, I had to create everything from scratch after going beyond the short prompt I had put together for this chapter. So, writing this was harder than I thought, and it took a while.

Comments are welcome and appreciated.

Update on 12/13/24: This fic has been cross-posted on Squidge World and the updated version posted on there has been copied here.

See the end of the work for more notes

Explosions rocked the city. Alva scowled as parts of the city, which he considered his own, were on fire. He would never take any responsibility for these events, even though they were happening in response to his draconian measures and harsh crackdown. Both had compelled everyone in Steamland to work on a fleet to invade the peaceful nation of Avalor. The amount of skepticism among the populace was growing every day as more people refused to be part of his warmongering. Even so, he had a loyal cadre around him. Robots surrounded the Gunderson Steamworks building, protecting it from any attack. Just as the robots would do anything to defend him, the revolutionaries in the sewers would do whatever it took to take power.

Alva realized that he only had one shot to invade Avalor. He believed that with swift defeat of the Avalorans, using all the available sky vehicles, whether zeppelins, airships, blimps, or something else, he could consolidate his power over the citizenry. This idea was very naïve. It did not account for the fact that the city would be vulnerable during the absence of Steamland's best ships, allowing the revolutionaries to get the upper hand. Arrogantly, he thought that these pipsqueaks, as he called them, had no chance at taking over. He hoped to ride it out until the ships returned, victorious and triumphant. He couldn’t be more wrong.

As it turned out, the explosions were not from the revolutionaries, but from aging infrastructure within the city itself. Alva couldn't care less. He might as well blame the revolutionaries anyway. Clearing his throat, he started speaking into a microphone. It was connected to the main radio station in the city, the SRN.

"Today, the rapscallions struck again. They have destroyed parts of our grand city with their dastardly plots."

He then tried to tie this to the Avaloran "enemies" he concocted out of thin air while producing new villains to fear and despise.

"As you know, these so-called revolutionaries are *simply agents of Avaloran terror* and will stop at nothing to unseat me from power. The traitor Lady Bowmore has *shamefully joined* their ranks. She must be punished for her misdeeds. Stay on high alert. Long live Steamland!"

He clicked off the microphone and leaned back in his chair. He sighed. He *hoped* it would get better, so he could rule without these interruptions.

Alva’s hopes would not become a reality. Any person with sense knew that to be true. But he was drunk off a desire for more power and would do anything to keep himself in control. In the sewers, the revolutionaries were deciding on the next action to take. One of the first priorities was to save LAWLOR's comrades from Alva's prisons, where these people had been thrown after he had broken up the huge workers demonstration. No one was sure how this could be carried out. Lizzy had an idea. Ellie and the others in LAWLOR were listening carefully.

"I propose we use Alva's own robots to get the workers out of the cages. Make some sort of distraction that causes the robots to do our work *for us*."

Her comrades were not so sure. Trusting the robots was risky. Ellie, however, thought that the idea might have promise. Ellie resolved to convince their compatriots that Lizzy's idea, and Lizzy herself, had value. This idea, they believed, would ensure that the organization could help liberate the people of Steamland from tyrannical rule. They saw it as one step toward that goal. Scratching their chin, Ellie stood in front of everyone and pointed to Lizzy.

"She is my friend," they began, and then added, "we should listen to *her*. I know you might think that by doing this we are putting ourselves in danger. But…" They stopped and cleared their throat. They continued. "*We can do this!* We must! We will be heroes of the people if we do so."

Comrades rallied around the idea, to Ellie's surprise. They had not expected this, instead thinking that Lizzy's ideas would be shot down. They were proud of their fellow revolutionaries, hoping it would bring change in the future. The detailed planning for the maneuver began. Even with Ellie working as the chief archivist of the SAM, they had enough time for LAWLOR. This was because the archives had been closed on account of recent activity in the city and self-caused mechanical failure, with repairs said to take over a month.

Fast forward a few days to the start of what had been called "Operation LIZFREE" in honor of Lizzy for coming up with the idea in the first place. Slinking across the streets at night, the comrades divided into a few teams. Everyone had a specific responsibility, some of whom were leaders and others who carried supplies. Each group had a cover story in case Alva's roving robots caught them at one point or another: All were maintenance workers repairing broken steam pipes in the city before people woke up in the morning. It seemed convincing enough.

Approaching one of the warehouses, Ellie threw a retrofitted light bottle, which exploded with a flash when it hit the ground. It created enough smoke for the teams to enter the building and free the workers imprisoned there. This task was easily carried out. This is because the workers were inside, but not chained together or cuffed in any way. Perhaps, Alva had thought he could use them in the future, although this would not be possible if the workers were freed. He had never considered that as a possibility, believing arrogantly that the opposition to him was manufactured, not having any self-awareness that he ruled by putting others in fear of himself.

The workers were handed weapons. All were forever grateful to LAWLOR. The workers proceeded to bash in the robots and escaped to the tunnels down below, to speak with the revolutionaries about how to undermine Alva's control in Steamland. While these sewer passageways were often under lit, you could hear the hissing from pipes that ran through them, the dripping of water and rivers of sewage. However, LAWLOR had installed some wiring in the tunnels, allowing each one to be lit without even using a torch. All someone had to do was to flick a switch, then the tunnel would be illuminated by what some called "buzzbrighters." That is exactly what happened when Ellie flicked one of the switches. The darkness in the tunnels receded away and the artificial light filled the space. Unlike some sewers, these were clean and free of rodents like rats and mice. Each sewer pipe was well-designed even though those unfamiliar with the directions could easily get lost in the maze of tunnels. This made sure that none of Alva's robots would find the home base of these revolutionaries.

The tunnels were uniquely designed, complete with shafts for ventilation. However, the tunnels had degraded over the years. Paint on the walls had begun to peel. Occasionally, green ooze, a chemical byproduct of some factories on the surface, leached into the tunnels. Extraordinarily little daylight came inside, as the tunnels were a system all their own, damp and wet in some areas from drainage. Even so, it had become a home for these rebels, due to its relative inaccessibility to outsiders and artificial lighting throughout the tunnels. Ellie walked in front of the group and spun around. They declared, "welcome to LAWLOR City." The electric light amazed the workers, even though, on the surface, the city could twinkle in the night.

Unfortunately, this awe was short-lived. Alva had a wicked scheme to take further control. He ordered his robotic enforcers to shut down all the power in the city except to his building. These automatons were different from humans: none had any minds and did not question him. One by one, each machine implemented his decision with exact precision. The lights began to flicker and grow dim. While these revolutionaries had a generator, no one expected it would ever be used. This turn of events surprised everyone there, especially Ellie. While they wanted to strategize for what to do next, the other comrades wanted immediate action. Despite the fact, Ellie deeply disagreeing with this approach, they decided to leave and hide out in the archives, where they could be protected. They renounced their role as the leader, to everyone's shock. Only moments before to doing that, they instructed Lizzy, as their last command, to protect LAWLOR by any means necessary. While Lizzy worried about Ellie, she agreed to go along, vowing to return once everything was safe. Ellie gave her a communication device so both could be contact with one another in case of any trouble.

In no time at all, the revolutionaries, and the workers, who followed behind, were on the streets of Steamland. The calm sounds of night were replaced with shouting from people with hand-held torches. The people Lizzy and others saw were angry, with any tools at the disposal of each person. These people walked through the dark streets, shouting "turn on the lights! Or we'll knock out yours!" No one could tell if this had been organized beforehand or was spontaneous. It appeared to be more of the latter. There were no leaders, and everyone aimlessly walked through the streets. The slogans, direction, or anything else which would unite the group together, were clearly not coordinated. As Lizzy, Ellie, and the other LAWLOR members knew, more than anyone, even so-called leaderless groups end up having one or more people which guide the group. Such people ensure that a group, or even a movement, has the strength and ability to have a focused mission, and goals.

Some people began running ahead, holding torches in their hands and began smashing the windows of businesses, every single one in sight. Often this type of destruction had a purpose, with only certain establishments targeted, due to their treatment of a specific community. In this case, however, the windows of every business down the road were smashed, no matter what it was, making Lizzy think this could be a distraction from something bigger. Lamenting the destruction of such businesses, she continued ahead. The revolutionaries warily followed her, while the workers scattered in all directions, fearing for their lives. Lizzy shook her head, lamenting them fleeing, after all the work to free those workers. No one wanted something like this to happen. The tensions had risen so high that this destruction had been the result. Or, more likely, a malevolent force had taken hold of some citizens in Steamland, manipulating genuine concerns, grievances, and anger which boiled over with the blackout Alva caused that night.

Suddenly, a legion of Alva's robots, who looked a little humanoid, approached the people in the streets. All spoke with one voice, declaring in unison: "Citizens, *please* return to your homes. It is for your protection."

None of the people did so, refusing to move. As a result, the robots raised their rifles and repeated their demand.

"If this crowd does not disperse, we will be forced to use lethal force."

Lizzy and her fellow LAWLOR revolutionaries were worried. Getting caught in the crossfire would be *fata*l. Everyone decided to retreat to the SAM for the time being and meet up with Ellie. The robots, however, would not wait for anyone and acted quickly. Assembling themselves in two lines, some kneeled, and others stood tall. In a split second, the robots discharged a volley from their weapons onto the crowd. Bullets that scalded and burned on impact, some more severe than others, flew into the mass of people. This was done in such a way to counter *any* criticism from Steamlandians that Alva wanted to kill his own citizens, while keeping control. Scores of people fell from their injuries, while the others decided to charge ahead haphazardly.

Those attacking the robots head-on would be test subjects for Alva's new weapon. Lizzy and her comrades watched in horror as a blast from the rail gun hit people's bodies, causing each person to enter a state of suspended animation, freezing in place. They didn't stay for very long, waiting to avoid being maimed by this terrifying weapon. As they escaped to the SAM, Ellie and her comrades felt relieved, until they saw several people surrounding the archives building. This did not bode well for anyone.

"Down with the system!" one shouted, while another shrieked "Detonate the State!" These people were part of the Anarchist Steamfitting Saboteurs, known as A.S.S. for short.

Each one held explosives, ready to detonate each one. The LAWLOR revolutionaries were concerned. Some pleaded for tensions to be lowered.

"Our friend is in there!" one exclaimed. Another reminded the anarchists that the records inside had *lasting value*, adding that destroying the building would do little, since Alva had such a stranglehold on everything. These people would not listen. This group would do whatever necessary, even if people were killed or hurt in the process. The tactics employed were as bad, if not worse, than what Alva had done to the citizens of Steamland. Lizzy began crying. She begged the group to desist. "Please, my good sirs…just let me get my friend out of there…they mean the world to me…you can do whatever you want with the building after that…*I don't care*."

The anarchists sneered. Being told what to do by a former cop seemed like an insult. *All* cops were jerks and bastards to them. This *made sense*, considering how the police had treated some Steamlandians in the past and their role in supporting the city's class hierarchy. Even Lizzy was part of this system to them as she had been part of high society.

"We won't listen you, damn dirty pig," one of the anarchists declared, feeling proud of himself for telling off an "oppressor." She shook her head. She *hated* having to explain this to people. She knew where he was coming from. Even so, she felt that this animosity had to be

put aside, at least for now, considering the awfulness of Alva and his actions since becoming a sovereign.

She shouted in the face of the anarchist to make her point even clearer. "I'm not a cop anymore! You are sick if you think I am on the same side as a man who literally gunned down people in the street…then, what is wrong with you?"

One of these people tried to act tough and looked her in the eyes. In the process, he clumsily triggered the explosives. This is not what the anarchists wanted. The bombs had only been a bluff to get attention to themselves. Like many such people, these anarchists played a big game, while each one only did things to boost egos *of themselves*. As the LAWLOR comrades fled to relative safety, Lizzy callously pushed the anarchists inside the building. These saboteurs would be trapped inside the structure as the countdown for the explosion continued.

"You will die just like the woman I love!" she shouted. They asked for her forgiveness. She gave them all the stink eye. Anyone who put down Ellie was an awful person in her book. While some could see her actions as reprehensible, she justified it for one simple reason: she would anything for Ellie, even if it meant maiming or hurting someone else.

She got out of the way just in time. The archives blew up into a million pieces. Miraculously, the anarchists were not injured and catapulted out of Steamland itself, instead, into the great land beyond. Where these saboteurs lived no one knew or cared. Lizzy got down on her knees and started sobbing. "Ellie!" she cried out. One of her fellow comrades patted her on the shoulder. She tried to say something to make her feel better. She chuckled.

"You know, those anarchists…they are the *real asses* here." A slight smile came across Lizzy's face. She felt a little better, and then heard something nearby, the turning of a metal wheel. As she moved closer, she saw some of the rubble moving, and fly in all directions. Ellie jumped through the air, shouting "huzzah!" Lizzy was so much in awe of her friend, their beauty, and grace, in flying across the ruins, that she continued staring upwards. Ellie took advantage of this and came behind Lizzy. They wrapped their arms around her, hugging her tightly. It gave her a bit of a fright. She shivered only for a second, but Ellie's warmth against her body, even through their clothes, made her fears *melt away.*

"I was so worried about you…Lizzy," Ellie remarked, continuing to hug their friend.

Tears started to stream down their face. Lizzy stared at Ellie. She began to cry too. She had been wracking herself with guilt after leaving Ellie behind. She knew that they wanted to do more strategizing and decision-making before engaging in action, opposite of what comrades of LAWLOR had wanted at the time. Lizzy wiped the tears from her face and echoed what Ellie had been saying.

"I felt the *same way* as you…I wanted you to come along…but I am *glad* you didn't"

This surprised Ellie. Why would Lizzy be glad? This didn't make any sense. They were very confused about why their friend would be saying this, as it *almost* seemed heartless.

About to say something, their friend continued. "…because it is dangerous out there…people were frozen in place by some new weapon…and some set fire to storefronts without rhyme or reason."

Now it *all* made sense. The fact that Lizzy had been that concerned caused them to reassess. Did this mean, she thought, that this new friend liked *them*? This seemed like an educated guess, but it couldn't hurt asking about this directly.

Without much time to process anything, they blurted out, "you did this all because you *like me*, right?"

This caught Lizzy off guard. Where was this interest coming from and why was it so sudden? She couldn't think of anything else to say, except to shout *"of course I like you!*" leading Lizzy to blush a little, with Ellie doing the same.

One of the LAWLOR comrades rolled her eyes. While she was *glad* that Ellie and Lizzy were getting along, there were bigger issues to deal with. She tried to bring the focus back to what mattered. "

"So, this is *nice* and all, but…what are we…going to do about the archives? And Mx., what is our plan now?"

Ellie shook their head. While still holding Lizzy's hand, they addressed the beleaguered comrades. They knew exactly what to do and what the priorities would be. That much was clear. The archives would have to wait until another time.

"We need to get out of here first…the archives will be fine…I already *backed up everything* on an off-site facility…although there is definitely a records loss here. Back to the sewers!"

Everyone agreed, even though Ellie wasn't the leader anymore. One by one, each person climbed down the ladder and into the pipes.

They were out of harm's way for now. Usually a squadron of steam-powered bombers, piloted by robots, would be overhead and hovered over the city, ready to attack anything that moved. However, these bombers were en route *to Avalor,* giving the revolutionaries *a tactical advantage*. What came next, in the days to come, was something that neither LAWLOR, prominent members like Lizzy or Ellie, nor those living in the city would ever expect: an assassination by a group of murder professionals and the arrival of a queen who would turn everything upside down.

End Notes

The SRN was originally mentioned in part 2. The wikipedia pages on volley fire, suspended animation, and suspended animation in fiction were helpful for this story, as was, very marginally, the article "Steampunk for Historians." I struggled over rating this fic and decided that despite some parts of the story, it was not as mature as I had thought originally, so I rated it as "Teen and Up."

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!